

## Alicia Yaffe, Los Angeles, CA

Prosperity begins with the environment. I don't want to live in a trash-filled, resource-poor world. Everybody needs a healthy environment, clean water, sustainable forestry. It's about the impact that these innovations can have and connecting with people. As Jews, we view ourselves as leaders, stewards of the environment. We are never going to win the argument for Israel's right to exist on religious grounds. But if you look at reasons why Israel needs to exist in a broader sense, it is a leader in research and development and lifestyles that benefit all of humanity, not just Israel. We can build partnerships with like-minded organizations (they don't need to be Jewish) to help educate the broader world. From various points of expertise, we will be able to broaden JNF's audience and enable our projects to be more impactful and recognized throughout the world.

# A LOOK AT JNF'S NEWLY FORMED

## From Trees to Green Innovation

Dan Cohan, Chair, Environment Committee & Edward Paul, VP, Environment Committee



“JNF? Oh, the Tree People.” To most of the world, that's who we are. Just as Jews are known as the People of the Book, we are the Tree People. JNF has been planting trees for over a century. But today our portfolio includes so much more. Today, among all our other work, we lead the world in Green Innovation.

What is Green Innovation? JNF supports projects that make the desert bloom, restore ecosystems, increase available water, and create sustainable development. We've gone far beyond trees without straying from our roots: developing the Land of Israel for generations to come.

Today, our Green Innovation work gives us a fresh opportunity to connect with people who are deeply concerned about environment and sustainability, a hot issue in many Jewish communities. By addressing topics they care about, we can bring new people into the JNF family.

How do we open this discussion? Sometimes it's easier to start with a big idea than with the details. In this case, the big idea is one of several environmental themes: **Environmental Restoration**, **Sustainable Development**, and high-tech desert agriculture in the **Arava Agri-Tech Corridor**. These themes, identified by the new JNF Environment Committee, are a way to help market our existing environmental projects. They exemplify JNF's Green Innovation, benefiting Israel and providing valuable know-how for the rest of the world.

JNF readers are familiar with some of our **Environmental Restoration** work, such as Carmel Renewal, helping to restore burned forests on Mount Carmel and to better equip firefighters. But do you know about our work in the Hula Valley at Lake Agamon, where we restored wetlands that are an important sanctuary for migrating birds? Or about the Shamir Drill project that tapped a new aquifer in the Golan and is indirectly helping refill Lake Kinneret? Or about our work in the northern Negev, planning the cleanup of the heavily polluted


Besor dry river system that runs from Mount Hebron through Be'er Sheva and Gaza to the sea? How about our coral gardening research in the Gulf of Eilat that developed ways to “reforest” the Red Sea coral reefs?

You may know about JNF's **Sustainable Development** work in the desert city of Be'er Sheva with our new urban River Park and its green belt and lake supplied by reclaimed water. And you may know about the many JNF reservoirs that capture treated wastewater for agriculture. But do you know about the Wadi Attir project in sustainable indigenous desert agriculture, partnering with the Negev Bedouin community of Hura? Or our partnerships in developing solar electricity in the Hevel Eilat region to power Eilat?

And then there's the **Arava Agri-Tech Corridor**, with projects situated up and down the Arava Valley between the Dead and Red Seas. These projects make the desert bloom in technically sophisticated ways. The agricultural R&D stations (Yair, Zohar) developed greenhouse methods to grow Israel's winter vegetables. AICAT provides agricultural training in advanced Israeli methods to international students from Asia and Africa. The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies performs arid lands research and joint Arab-Jewish environmental education. The National Center for Mariculture in Eilat is developing ways to farm marine fish (like grouper and sea bass) in desert ponds fed by saltwater, aiming to “paint the desert blue.”

In this environment issue of *B'Yachad* you can read about some of these projects. Let's share the story of JNF's environmental work in Israel with others who care about the Earth. After all, we are the Tree People, but we are also so much more. ■

To get involved in JNF's environment committee, contact Beth Gluck at [bgluck@jnf.org](mailto:bgluck@jnf.org)



## Paul Gillis, Denver, CO

I want to be a good steward of the environment and a role model for my children and my community. I also have a deep love of Israel. The combined passions for the environment and the Jewish people led me to JNF. We want to position JNF so that its environmental work is more visible, better categorized and available to people for whom an interest in the environment is a more effective pull than the traditional Zionist message. We are opening up the perspective: it's not solely planting trees and conserving water, it goes far beyond that and encompasses the hot topics of today, such as restoration, sustainability, greening—values that resonate strongly with people in the United States and Israel.

## Barbara Gordon, San Francisco, CA

With the world population so large, we need to develop places that aren't ideally suited for population and, in doing so, figure out ways to do that without harming the balance. If we can do that in a country like Israel, it would be a powerful example of Israel's many positive contributions to the world. Israel gets so much negative press; we are looking for a way to highlight what's going on there in caring for the environment. Water is going to be the world's most precious resource. Learning how to manage it more effectively will be critical. California, as an agriculturally focused state, faces many of the same issues as Israel; learning how to produce agriculture in water-wise ways is extremely important.

Members of the new Environment Committee shared with us about their passion for the environment, the importance of emphasizing JNF's environmental focus, and what they hope to achieve.

# ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

## Mary Ellen Hogan, Tampa, FL

Awareness of the importance of the environment in Israel is much broader than in the US. Israelis love to get out in the environment and they value it in a different way than we do in the States. We have an opportunity to take what we know about environmental issues and apply our knowledge to help Israel. I'm really optimistic about the positive impact that this committee can have. We can broaden the way JNF looks at projects in Israel. The Be'er Sheva River Park is one in which you can see the transformation of the city, but it's less apparent how much that project has improved the city's pollution.